

Effectiveness

& EFFICIENCY

School Reviews

Executive Summary

Prepared for the
Board of Education
Bluestem Unified School District #205
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Center for Innovative School Leadership

Emporia State University • Fort Hays State University • Pittsburg State University

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The function of the Center for Innovative School Leadership (CISL) is to conduct school efficiency reviews for school districts on a voluntary basis to help them realize greater efficiency and effectiveness. CISL was created through Kansas Senate Bill No. 304 in the 2004 legislative session as a cooperative endeavor between Emporia State University, Fort Hays State University, and Pittsburg State University.

The review process used by CISL is modeled after successful programs conducted in Arizona, Texas, and Virginia. The goal of CISL is to identify best practices, cost savings, and potential efficiency and effectiveness strategies for school districts in the areas of leadership, teaching and learning, facilities management, and human resources. CISL will identify good practices to be shared with other school districts and provide insight for school districts to realize greater efficiency in overall school operations.

The studies are not a review of classroom instruction or teaching strategies. The information provided by CISL can, however, assist with student achievement to help the district reach the ultimate goal: producing an environment for students to learn at higher levels.

Highlights found through the review process are provided here, including:

- **an overview of Bluestem School District #205**
- **a comparison of Bluestem to peer and region schools**
- **highlights from reports written by team members who interviewed school district personnel**
- **Effectiveness and Efficiency School Review survey results**

A full report will be issued following the presentation of the executive summary. All reports are public documents.

BLUESTEM SCHOOL DISTRICT #205

The Bluestem School District is one of several school districts volunteering to participate in the school efficiency review process. We thank them for their willingness to be involved with this project.

The review of Bluestem's School District was initiated in November 2010 and concluded in May 2011. This report will identify best practices of the Bluestem School District and provide suggestions on ways to further improve the district's operation efficiencies.

School district profile information:

- The Bluestem School District is located in Butler County in South Central Kansas. Bluestem is one of the nine school districts located in the county.
- The 2009 U.S. Census data reports Butler County had an estimated population of 64,084. In 2000, the census reported an estimated 59,486 resided in the county. This is a 7.7% increase in the county's population.
- The racial makeup of the school district is over 87% Caucasian; this figure has been relatively steady over the years. This compares to an 87% average in the region schools, a 93% average among peer schools, and a statewide average of 69%.
- The school district consists of 348 square miles compared to the state average of 280 square miles per school district.
- Bluestem School District currently employs 77 employees, including 49 certified teaching and administrative staff.
- The 2010-11 proposed general fund and supplemental general fund is \$5,874,579.
- In 2009-10 the average teacher's salary was \$51,541. This compares to an average of \$48,925 in region schools, \$47,535 among peer schools, and a statewide average of \$48,671.
- In 2009-10 the average administrator's salary was \$75,346. This compares to an average of \$76,206 in region schools, \$70,198 among peer schools, and a statewide average of \$83,911.
- In 2009-10, the 20-year salary trend for teachers was ranked 63rd in the state. The region average was 136th, and the peer average was 179th.
- In 2009-10 the pupil-teacher ratio was 12.2:1. This compares to an average of 13.7:1 in region schools, 11.9:1 among peer schools, and a statewide average of 13.1:1.

COMPARISONS TO PEER AND REGION SCHOOLS

CISL has established peer and region schools to support comparability of selected criteria. There were four peer schools selected and 47 region schools to which Bluestem was compared. The peer schools were selected based on similar size, similar socio-economical status, and performance based on state test results. The region schools were selected based on school districts that are in contiguous counties which include Chase, Cowley, Elk, Greenwood, Harvey, Marion, Sedgwick, and Sumner counties. Comparisons between Bluestem and these peer schools, Hoisington, Moundridge, Oakley, and Wakeeney are explored in further detail in the complete report; the full report also includes all school survey results and the full findings by the Bluestem review team.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM REPORTS

Team members were selected to evaluate the school district in the areas of leadership, teaching and learning, facilities management, and human resources. Each team member submitted reports with findings, commendations, recommendations / opportunities for improvement, and impacts. An extended report will be submitted in the future with the full findings. Included here are highlights from the commendations, recommendations / opportunities for improvement, and projected impacts.

COMMENDATIONS:

Facilities Management

Energy Management

1. There appears to be proactivity in the maintenance of the HVAC systems and facilities in general.

Food Service

1. The food service department receives limited funding.

Organization and Management

1. A 4-day school week has been implemented to reduce expenditures while still meeting academic needs.

Safety and Security

1. The district's insurance company's loss control staff conducted a security assessment in 2010.

Human Resources

Evaluation and Supervision

1. The classified staff like the online training opportunities and feel they are worthwhile.

Organization and Management

1. Administrators have good communication utilizing technology – example, BOE minutes on the district website, email updates, auto-dialer for parents.

Recruitment, Hiring and Retention

1. The committee hiring process seems to be working well.

Salary, Wages and Benefits

1. Teacher salaries are very competitive and attractive.

Leadership

Administrative Team

1. The superintendent gives the principals local control at their buildings, which include the management of their budget and the educational leadership.
2. Good written communication with parents in the district through their website and newsletters.

Board of Education

1. Good discussion at the board meeting between the superintendent and board members as well as the audience.

Teaching & Learning

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

1. The move to the 4-day week has allowed the staff to study the curriculum and make decisions on what is relevant to the students and needs to be included in the intended curriculum. It has made delivery of content more efficient.

Staff Development

1. The district has 10 days of staff development for the year, six (6) of which occur on Fridays when school is not in session. Some of the days are devoted to district level priorities. The remainder of the days is dedicated to activities supporting the building school improvement plans and needs.
2. The plans for moving some of the staff development activities to a moodle server next year is intriguing and has the potential to provide some good training opportunities for the staff.

Technology

1. The district has recognized the need to provide technologies to the classrooms as tools to help improve teaching and learning. Currently, all the classrooms are to have a LCD projector and document Cameras (ELMOs).

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT / RECOMMENDATIONS:

Facilities Management

Custodial and Maintenance Services

1. It is recommended the district regularly provide continued staff training and evaluations to staff.
Impact: This would increase the efficiency of staff and continued cross training would enable staff to be proactive in maintenance of the facilities.
2. It is recommended the district consider the installation of hand dryers in restroom and wash areas.
Impact: This would provide a savings on towel products in the amount of \$1,000-\$2,000 per year.

Food Service

1. It is recommended the district continue to work with the Purchasing Coop to buy in volume.
Impact: This would result in yearly savings of up to an additional 5% or \$5,000.

Transportation

1. It is recommended the district consider contacting surrounding districts to share mechanical duties. A common industry guideline is approximately 25-30 vehicles per mechanic.
Impact: This would result in up to a 50 % savings or approximately \$15,000 in the mechanics' compensation expenses while maintaining adequate services for the district's own fleet.

Human Resources

Organization and Management

1. It is recommended the district communicate better to publicize meetings and the results of those meetings. This communication should include methods other than technology for those individuals who do not access technology. Examples might be to post fliers in the post office and café, notifications in the monthly newsletter, and perhaps district officials meeting with the community at the café and senior citizens center. Perhaps students could become involved in distributing fliers and/or creating posters to advertise important meetings and/or communicate noteworthy information.
Impact: This would begin to build trust between the district, administration, and community. This is imperative for the health of the district and community. If the community feels like the district is very upfront with all communication, they would no longer question and complain about purchases.

Personnel Policies and Procedure

1. It is recommended the district update job descriptions on an annual basis and be given to each employee at least once a year so they can be reviewed by the employee. A recommendation would be to tie the evaluation to the job description.

Impact: This would allow optimum production from the employee and an accurate way of assessing their work. Job descriptions are very important as they dictate what is expected of each employee. It is imperative these job descriptions are up-to-date and the employee is knowledgeable about these expectations.

Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention

1. It is recommended the district require exit interviews for all employees who leave the district.
Impact: This would let the district and BOE understand the concerns of employees. These concerns can be analyzed to determine if changes should be made in order to increase staff morale and/or retain competent employees. If exit interviews are conducted in a professional manner they would become a wealth of information for administrators and the district.

Salary, Wages and Benefits

1. It is recommended the district assign a committee of employees affected by the retirement benefit in order to determine if this is an expenditure that could be eliminated.
Impact: The retirement benefit is certainly a positive perk. However, eliminating this policy would result in money that might be able to be put into salaries. Before the policy is changed it would be important to find out what the feelings of the affected employees are – would they rather keep the plan or have more money for salaries now? Obviously not everyone would agree, but having a decision made by committee and listening to the opinions of those affected might go a long way in having a decision that is supported by the masses.

Leadership

Administrative Team

1. It is recommended the superintendent meet with teaching staff on a regular basis, possibly once a quarter, to discuss his ideas about the future of the district, budgetary and other issues/challenges the district is facing.
Impact: This would build a stronger relationship with the faculty and strengthen the school district's program. Building collaborative processes would improve the quality of the educational programming which would lead to improved student performance.

Board of Education

1. It is recommended the district develop a 2-3 year strategic plan that includes capital improvement as well as educational and curricular strategies. This plan should be developed with all stakeholders—including but not limited to parents and patrons, students, and staff (both classified and non-classified).
Impact: This would serve as an excellent communication tool to use with the community and staff on the future direction of the district. If you gain input from all stakeholders, the enthusiasm and support for the district would increase. Builds trust and credibility with your community.
2. It is recommended the district improve communication with teachers and students. This includes an invitation to students and their teachers to make a presentation about some aspect of their program to each board meeting.

Impact: This would increase contact with teachers and students, provide a formal opportunity for teachers to connect with the board of education, demonstrate to the teachers that the board members show an interest in their work, and create a stronger sense of cohesion between the board members and the teachers. Fifteen minutes of the board's agenda could go a long way to create a trustworthy relationship between the district teachers, superintendent, and the board members. Strengthening this relationship is particularly helpful during a time of great change.

Parent/Patron Organizations

1. It is recommended the district have parents brainstorm ways in which the district and community can increase their interaction.

Impact: This would increase support and good will between the district and the community.

Teaching & Learning

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

1. It is recommended the district use a systemic process to analyze district assessment data. Whatever process chosen can then be extended to use for all staff for data analysis work during curriculum alignment work.

Impact: This would support understanding of data analysis and increased usage of data driven decision making by staff. It would also provide a common language to be used during expected collaboration efforts between buildings.

2. It is recommended the building principals, especially at the combined middle school/high school, increase the number of classroom walk-through formative evaluations followed up with written feedback on observed classroom observations.

Impact: This would validate for the principals that the intended curriculum is actually be taught. Teachers usually appreciate the feedback given by administrators on instructional delivery and its impact on student learning. Hattie (1992) concluded "the most powerful single modification that enhances achievement is feedback." Feedback would occur after those walk-through visits only as the principals make concerted efforts to regularly visit the classrooms and design a tool that would provide effective feedback to the teachers.

Staff Development

1. It is recommended the district continue its commitment to support quality staff development activities and maintain the ten days on the district calendar for professional development. Continued support and reliance on the PDC to help define needed staff development activities is further recommended.

Impact: This would improve teacher learning and that translates into improved student learning. The PDC has a good reputation in the district and has provided good leadership in shaping staff development plans.

Technology

1. It is recommended the district incorporate integration activities in the classrooms into the job description of the new technology director.

Impact: This would assist teachers on a regular basis instead of just during an in-service activity. Use of technology is not an event, but needs to be a regular part of instruction. The district appears to have a solid base of technology equipment. There will always be “wires and pliers” issues that need to be addressed and much of that can be done remotely. The area where huge gains can be realized is in the integration of technology into the instructional delivery. Teachers usually know how to make the technology work, but need much more assistance making the technology relevant in the learning process for the students.

2. It is recommended the district finish updating the list of technology equipment. The finished product needs to be in electronic format making it more efficient from which to pull needed information.

Impact: This would make decisions regarding replacement of equipment and subsequent cost more accurate. When looking at developing a regular schedule for replacing computers, data on age and model of the computers is absolutely necessary. Removal of machines from service is recommended for those machines clearly out dated so as to not add additional strain in support to the system.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY SCHOOL REVIEW SURVEY RESULTS

ADMINISTRATORS AND BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBERS SURVEY RESULTS

Of the 11 member of the Bluestem School District, 8 completed the survey. Of the 52 statements administrators and board of education members were asked to respond to, the items below were the ones receiving the strongest responses.

Commendations from Administrators and Board of Education Members:

- All of the administrators and board of education members responding said the superintendent is a respected and effective instructional leader.
- Almost 90% of the administrators and board of education members responding felt district salaries are competitive with similar positions in the job market.
- Over 85% of the administrators and board of education members responding said students feel safe and secure at school.
- All of the administrators and board of education members responding thought schools are clean.

Opportunities for Improvement / Recommendations from Administrators and Board of Education Members:

- Half of the administrators and board of education members responding thought the district does not have effective special programs for advanced placement.
- Half of the administrators and board of education members responding said the district does not have effective special programs for students at risk of dropping out of school.
- Over 60% of the administrators and board of education members responding felt teachers are not rewarded for superior performance.
- Nearly 40% of the administrators and board of education members responding thought drugs and alcohol are a problem in this district.

CLASSIFIED STAFF SURVEY RESULTS

Of the 28 possible classified staff in the Bluestem School District, 23 completed the survey. Of the 45 statements classified staff members were asked to respond to, the items below were the ones receiving the strongest responses.

Commendations from Classified Staff:

- Over 80% of the classified staff responding said the board of education members have a good knowledge of the educational needs of students.
- Over 80% of the classified staff responding thought the superintendent is a respected and effective instructional leader.
- 78% of the classified staff responding said central office personnel support the education process.
- 95% of the classified staff responding felt building administrators in our school care about students' needs.

Opportunities for Improvement / Recommendations from Classified Staff:

- Over 25% of the classified staff responding thought the morale of the central office is not good.
- Nearly 40% of the classified staff responding said the district does not have effective special programs for students at risk of dropping out of school.
- Over 25% of the classified staff responding said the district does not reward the competence and experience of classified staff.

- Nearly 30% of the classified staff responding thought drugs and alcohol are a problem in the district.

PARENTS' SURVEY RESULTS

Of all the parents/patrons in the Bluestem School District, 31 completed the survey. Extrapolating highlights from the survey responses for this low of a number would more than likely lead to misidentification of concerns of this group and are therefore not included.

STUDENTS' SURVEY RESULTS

Of the 225 possible students in the Bluestem School District, 55 completed the survey. Of the 34 statements students were asked to respond to, the items below were the ones receiving the strongest responses.

Commendations from Students:

- 80% of the students responding felt principals and/or assistant principals in our school care about students' needs.
- 75% of the students responding said the district provides a high quality education.
- Over 80% of the students responding said they feel safe and secure at school.
- 83% of the students responding thought cafeteria staff is helpful and friendly.

Opportunities for Improvement / Recommendations from Students:

- Nearly half of the students responding thought the district does not have effective special programs for advanced placement.
- 33% of the students responding felt the district does not have effective counseling programs for students.
- 30% of the students responding thought schools do not regularly communicate with parents.
- 40% of the students responding said drugs and alcohol are a problem in this district.

TEACHERS' SURVEY RESULTS

Of all the teachers in the Bluestem School District, 46 completed the survey. Of the 44 statements teachers were asked to respond to, the items below were the ones receiving the strongest responses.

Commendations from Teachers:

- Over 90% of the teachers responding thought building administrators are effective as the instructional leaders of their schools.
- 94% of the teachers responding said teachers are given an opportunity to suggest programs and materials that they believe are most effective.
- Nearly 65% of the teachers responding thought benefits, other than health insurance, are adequate in the district.
- 94% of the teachers responding felt students feel safe and secure at school.

Opportunities for Improvement / Recommendations from Teachers:

- Over 25% of the teachers responding felt the district does not have effective special programs for advanced placement.
- Over 50% of the teachers responding thought the district does not have effective special programs for students at risk of dropping out of school.
- 60% of the teachers responding felt teachers are not rewarded for superior performance and experience.
- Over 60% of the teachers responding said drugs and alcohol are a problem in this district.